

PROTESTERS BEAT TEARGAS AND BRING FEAR TO BOSSES

EVIAN GIVES DELEGATES AN ATTACK OF THE VAPOURS

The G8 summit opened on 1st June in the French resort of Evian, on the shores of Lake Geneva. This was the group's first meeting in Europe since June 2001, when the world's most powerful people met in Genoa. On that occasion the Italian cops killed a protester, Carlo Giuliani. This time, resistance to the capitalist regime was even greater, as one of the participants reports.

A crew of us arrive in Geneva early on the morning of 28th May to witness every single window in sight being boarded up – and not with shitty chipboard either, but yellowish, fire-retardant wood. Later these boards will be covered in vibrant graffiti, artwork and cartoons, some torn down and the windows smashed any way, but on that Wednesday we see only a lone slogan on one board. It says 'tremble bourgeois'. Being a bit early, not much seems to be happening in Geneva and the campsite is miles away on the outskirts of town, so we make our way to Annemasse, over the border in France and on one of the two roads to Evian. Here we find two camps, VAAG for 'triple strength anarchy' and Intergalactic for NGOs such as ATTAC.

We stay in VAAG, but although it's beautiful we find some things frustrating. The camp is set up as a series of *barrios* or neighbourhoods which are formed around kitchens. The idea is to create a mini non-hierarchical society and for the camp itself to be an action, to create a proposition for a new way of living as well as destroying the old order. *Barrios* organise through daily meetings, from which delegates are sent to a camp-wide meeting.

But all the meetings are in French only, with no translation, and are mostly about the running of the camp itself. We rectify this slightly by getting people to help us translate everything on the noticeboard into English and by helping out in the welcome tent. But info about actions is spread by word of mouth and rumour, which is rife. But we do meet

loads of brilliant people. People from the town are welcomed and many come to look round. The organisation and infrastructure of the camp is something we could learn from in the UK.

While in Annemasse, we take part in two actions. The first, on Thursday 29th May, is attended by thousands of people from both camps. It's an ultra fluffly parade from the camp to Annemasse to introduce ourselves to the mostly working class people of the town (though in France, Annemasse is a suburb of Geneva which appears mostly to house people who work in the city's service industry but who can't afford to live there), and to override the media hype that we are all really scary. It passes off well with virtually no cop presence. The locals really love it and we dance to samba with a load of Turkish men from the kebab shop.

At one point the music stops, words are said in French and everyone sits down, even those with black flags. My mate and I look at each other: "What the fuck?" Then in English we're told: "a minute's silence for Carlo Giuliani." We sit down, reluctantly. "Well, for Carlo" my mate says. "Do you think Carlo would have wanted us to?" I ask incredulously.

Friday 30th May sees the No Borders demo in Geneva, and two large posses set off to the train station in Annemasse. Waking up slightly late, our gang go with the second group and arrive at the station to hear that the first group have managed to occupy a train to Geneva. We decide to do the same, both as an action for free transport and in solidarity with the French train drivers who are on strike this week. We're told that the railway people are offering a symbolic price of forty euros for the lot of us. We refuse and board the train, and they agree to take us any way! Can you imagine that happening in Britain?

Halfway to Geneva we hear that loads of riot cops are waiting for us at the other end, so a few minutes from Geneva station someone pulls the emergency cord, we force open the train doors and escape over the tracks. Over a fence and all 300 of us make our way to the No Border demo. As we leave, I turn to see the driver, standing at his door, hand raised in a fist, big grin across his face.

The demo is great, with the heavier elements holding off from any serious smashing until the G8 actually starts. Initially there are hardly any cops to be seen except some hiding in the bushes by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) building. We march to several symbolic buildings, including the WTO and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the most



Shielding from water hoses

important international agency dealing with the 'problem' of global migrations of people.

The huge gates of the WTO are pulled apart, Fairford-stylee, and a flare is fired at a lone cop photographer at one of the windows – he soon moves. Accompanied by a sound system playing bad French rock music we move on to the IOM, where windows are smashed and small fires are lit. There's a bit of confrontation with the police outside the Russian embassy compound and we get tear-gassed for the first time. Passing the Shell building a bit more trashing is done.

That night in the camp, the first meeting takes place about Sunday's actions. Sunday 1st June is the start of the G8 meeting itself, and the main day of action. We're told that as many people as possible should go to Lausanne, as the delegates in Geneva are 'definitely' being taken by road from Geneva to Lausanne, where they'll catch the ferry to Evian. This will be the 'only'

effective action, we're told.

We're pretty pissed off at the authoritarian way we're told to go to Lausanne and the total lack of info about any other actions in Annemasse or Geneva from the organisers, but since two of our crew have already gone ahead to Lausanne to check out the situation there, and they say more people are definitely needed, we decide to go. Unfortunately we've just bought a trolley-load of beer and wine so, unable to carry it all to Lausanne, we have to drink most of it on the spot.

On Saturday 1st June, we spend a lot of the day travelling to Lausanne, unfortunately missing a wicked impromptu action in Annemasse. The French socialist party (France's equivalent of Labour, socialist in name only) has organised a meeting in Annemasse which is to be addressed by the vice president of the World Bank, and Susan

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A SOCIAL FORUM FOR THE NORTH EAST A THREE-DAY EVENT IN DURHAM

- Friday 20th June
1.30 to 4.30pm: Anti-discrimination
- Saturday 21st June
9.30am to 12.30pm: The environment
1.30 to 4.30pm: Anti-oppression
5.30 to 8.30pm: International co-operation
- Sunday 22nd June
9.30am to 12.30pm: People over profit
1.30 - 4.30pm Education

For more details, including venue, visit www.dur.ac.uk/durham.socialforum/NESF

Protesters beat teargas

(continued from page 1)

George. Anarchists, quite rightly, decide that this is as illegitimate as the G8 – well not quite, but still pretty dodgy – and they demonstrate, initially peacefully, against it. Riot cops steam in and kick it off, ending with some G8 delegates trapped inside getting a taste of their own teargas.

Arriving in Lausanne, we find there are two camps – a government-sanctioned one, by a motorway with woodchip ground and no grass, or an 'illegal' one by the lake, with a beach, mountain views across the lake, trees and grass aplenty. Needless to say we choose the latter, though it's been threatened many times by the police. We set up camp on the beach.

Sunday is the major action day. In Lausanne the institutional left have largely pulled out due to political pressure (right-wing council, small movement, a window getting broken on Mayday, press hysteria, police threats, shop-owners with shotguns...) and as a result everyone left in town is willing to organise in a non-hierarchical way – anarchists and communists, spikies and fluffies, working together with no condemnation of anyone else's tactics. The two actions taking place are a series of blockades in the morning and a local workers' demo in the afternoon. Most people in the camps plan to go to both.

The anarchist actions begin at 6am, with the objective of not trying to get into the militarised red zone round the port but of blockading all the roads and the motorway in

order to stop the delegates getting from Geneva to the port in Lausanne, where they'll be transported by ferry to Evian.

There are five blocs. There's an 'Anthracite', dark grey/black bloc and a pink/silver/samba/carnival bloc, who both make barricades to block the roads. The Anthracite sometimes use fire while the pink and silver use frivolity and their bodies. Both are confrontational but in different ways, and there's a sense of both moving towards a middle ground in order to occupy the space left by the lack of a large padded bloc, to make sure there's a level of confrontation for everyone. Someone from the Anthracite/dark grey/black bloc tells me their aim is to be a heterogeneous bloc, with room for those who aren't the most confrontational. These two groups will try to take the nine roads into the Yellow Zone and support each other as needed.

The third bloc, Aqua, are sit-down pacifists, but they refuse to condemn the actions of others. They're to take the road along the lake front. There's also a bike bloc to take the motorway and a boat bloc for the lake (they get pretty far out before they're stopped).

The actions are brilliant, with the roads being blocked by chainsawed trees, burning barricades and samba dancers waving feather dusters. We're teargassed loads after getting to and holding a road, to the east of the city, that leads to the ferry. The Anthracite bloc get to and do a lot of damage to one of the hotels that delegates are staying in. They're completely disciplined in their attacks, hitting only corporate targets and no personal property.

The solidarity is amazing and the two blocs end up together, petrol station windows smashing in time to the samba beats, until the end of the morning. We hear later that delegates are prevented from getting to the summit until the afternoon, though this is also due to the brilliant blockading of every bridge in Geneva by people there. We also hear that people in Annemasse have blockaded both roads to Evian, holding them for four hours, stopping translators getting in, standing solid through the teargas. Locals, pissed off with the police, are bringing them lemons and water and making them coffee. There's also a march of 150,000 people from both Geneva and Annemasse, who meet at the French-Swiss border.

The blockading goes on for about six hours. Later, as we march back towards the two camps, police with teargas block the road to the illegal camp, forcing us all to go the legal camp. They then surround about 700 people at the legal camp, appearing from all directions, the motorway, down from the forest. They demand that we all go voluntarily to a detention centre where we will have to show our papers and be interrogated. We refuse. Many people don't have papers.

It's impossible to escape, so we decide to sit in rows with linked arms, those without papers at the back so they will be the last and least likely to be taken away. People are violently grabbed and taken away one by one, handcuffed with tight plastic cable ties, driven away in airless metal army vans. About 500 people are taken away in total, before police get news that the local workers' march from Lausanne has abandoned its original route in order to come down to the camp in solidarity with us. So cops leave the remaining 200 people free.

Those of us who get taken away (not arrested) are taken to an army building 20 minutes outside Lausanne and put in an ex-nuclear bunker in four concrete metal cages with no ventilation. Our passport details are

Two activists wounded



Guy Smallman, who took this picture, was shot by Swiss police.

The demo from Geneva to the border on 1st June was loud, large and peaceful. With the exception of a few people who smashed some windows at a BP station, the whole event had passed off without incident. After a brief party at the border, people started to wander back into Geneva, where they were greeted by dozens of German-speaking riot police, forming lines and cordoning off the junction. These started pushing people back and then withdrawing their line and starting the process all over again. This was the most blatant provocation I have ever seen.

About fifty yards down the road, some people started building a barricade anticipating a police attack. The police then outflanked them, sending a squad charging

in from behind while the police in front did the same. Suddenly the air was filled with concussion grenades. People began to escape up an open staircase. I was nearly at the top when a volley of grenades was fired and I felt something burning on my left leg. Some demonstrators came back and made a tourniquet to stop the bleeding. I've had surgery but don't yet know how bad the long-term damage is – I've lost half the feeling in one foot. I've been given enough morphine to sedate all the Happy Mondays for a month.

Guy is an activist-photographer whose work has often been used in *Freedom* and on *Indymedia*. Another British activist, Martin Shaw, was seriously injured in Lausanne the same day when cops cut the rope on which he'd abseiled over a bridge to unfurl a banner.

written down and we're held for four hours. At no point are we arrested, cautioned or told our rights. We're refused requests for lawyers, consuls, phone calls, food, translators and the German-speaking police imprisoning us say they don't know why we are being held. None of this is legal in Switzerland, where it's not even compulsory to carry identification.

But the solidarity and militancy among us is amazing, transforming what could have been a terrible experience into a really empowering one. We decide to make it as difficult for them as possible, quickly discovering a way to get the plastic handcuffs off, and we're pretty blatant about it. In the women's cell we immediately de-cuff every woman brought in, guards watching, and hang the cuffs on the cell bars. If they re-cuff us on a toilet trip, we just take them off again when we get back – so they give up.

There are several attempted breakouts, one from the women. We push our way out of the door when it's opened for a toilet trip, manage to grab open the opposite door. It's immediately closed by cops and after a five-minute struggle we're once again confined. They give us water, we use the bottles to bang on the bars and walls, all four cells making impromptu samba music, kicking the bars and trying to kick the door in. Every time the police chief appears, we scream 'no justice, no peace, fuck the police' loudly, continually and in his face until he scuttles off looking shocked. In the women's cell, we even try to start a fire with the paper from the water bottle labels.

Their plan is to take us to a big hall, to hold us before we're put on a train out of Lausanne, but our behaviour convinces them it will be dangerous to hold all these potentially riotous people in one room and, eventually, they drive us all together back to the camp.

Monday 2nd June

Ten of us board a pink and silver pirate raft. Skull and crossbones flying, our aim is to get to the port of Lausanne and blockade a ferry bringing delegates back from Evian. Our tactic is to stay too shallow and close to the rocks for police boats to intercept us, and to keep going no matter what. Heading out, we row to the chant of our legal number, sun glinting off the silver tailpieces worn by some of the raft's occupants. We ignore the police boat's requests to stop and we keep going towards yellow zone.

Reaching the edge of the zone, police activity increases. We move closer to the rocks, defying their attempts to hook us in. Six police boats appear, in varying sizes, trying to head us off and trap us in a small harbour. We move right on to the rocks and have a break to size up the situation and to drink all the wine and beer we have. Our land support is great, people swimming out with food and cigs and stripping down to their pants to get in and pull the raft right round the rocks.

With their help we make it into the yellow zone, the forbidden area, free of the harbour and to the irritation of the cops. They try to catch us with a big hook and an anchor but we fend them off with an umbrella. They lose the battle of wills, we have free run of the yellow zone but with the proviso that if we enter the red we'll be arrested. We plan to carry on regardless, but by the time the sun starts to fall and the wind goes against us, we realise we're still too far away to stop the ferry. We head back, with the help of the coastguards, to our beach and a have-a-go-heroes welcome.

The next day, we're back in Geneva for our flight out. After three days of riots the city is battle-scarred, with boards torn down, windows smashed, water cannons still going off in the distance and riot cops huddled on street corners trying to round up remaining casseurs.

- Thursday 29th May: Peaceful demos in Annemasse and Lausanne. Protesters meet local people.
- Friday 30th May: Contingents from the camps in Annemasse and Lausanne occupy trains to Geneva. The No Borders demo in Geneva. A Critical Mass bike rides through Geneva.
- Saturday 31st May: Counter-summits of the NGOs and left wing parties in Geneva and Annemasse. In Annemasse there's a demo against a French Socialist Party meeting, which is being addressed by the vice-president of the World Bank.
- Sunday 1st June: The G8 Summit begins, with blockades taking place from 5am. In Annemasse, the two main roads leading from Geneva to Evian are blocked. In Geneva, all the bridges over the river which divides the city in two are blocked. In Lausanne, the motorway leading from Geneva and all nine roads leading to the port are blocked. The summit is delayed until the afternoon.
- Two protesters are seriously injured, Martin Shaw in Lausanne and Guy Smallman in Geneva (see box, right).
- In the afternoon, large marches set off from Geneva and Annemasse, 150,000 people meeting at the French border. In Lausanne, 700 people are detained at a campsite by police, 500 of them taken away and detained for several hours. Lausanne's official march, which has been cancelled by the state, goes ahead anyway and diverts to the campsite in support of those detained.
- Monday 2nd June: Protests and blockades continue in Geneva. L'Usine, a building in Geneva which houses the Indymedia Centre, is surrounded by police. Those inside are detained, some beaten. In Lausanne a pirate raft breaches the yellow zone.
- Tuesday 3rd June: An anti-repression demo is held in Lausanne in solidarity with Martin Shaw. Climbers are lowered from a bridge in a reconstruction of the blockade in which he was injured. A road is blocked for several hours. In Geneva the riots continue.

Blocs make a splash by the Evian water



Pink and silver, black or aqua – what was their role?

This declaration of solidarity was written by friends who participated in the non-confrontational parts of the blockades in Lausanne on 1st June.

We are speaking in our name only, not in the name of the Aqua or Pink and Silver blocs which have disbanded. Still, as far as the divisions created by the corporate media go, we'd definitely be perceived as the kind of 'good' protesters they like to cuddle. But we want to say the following, loud and clear: for us, the only division worth talking about is that between the people of the world and the masters of death and exploitation.

The only 'ringleaders' that need to be exposed, isolated and removed from their position as menaces to society are George Bush, Vladimir Putin, Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schröder, Jean Chrétien and Junichiro Koizumi. Our determination to disrupt their yearly feasts of power is matched only by our contempt for that other handful of losers who, instead of fighting for the starving millions of the global South, came to Evian to kiss the hands of the torturers.

The blockades were undertaken by a large number of people with different expectations and sensibilities. But it was abundantly clear that everybody was agreeing to operate in solidarity. This was made clear not only by the written declarations of the different blocs but also from the abundant will to co-ordinate fluid actions on the ground.

The fact that some of us chose not to engage in highly confrontational tactics, whether for reasons of principle or of prudence, doesn't mean we automatically refuse to co-operate, and we defend those who did choose higher levels of confrontation. We're constantly looking for ways to live with our differences, so as to act together for a world of freedom, justice and peace. We challenge the corporate media to produce a single quote or soundbite in which someone who actually participated in the Lausanne blockades denounces another participant.

There's talk of fascist infiltration of the various black blocs. Since Genoa these claims have become certain people's knee-jerk reaction to high levels of confrontation, but we're prepared to look at the facts. Indeed, from what we saw in Lausanne there was an enormous presence of fascists. They

were all wearing police uniforms. These thugs almost killed one activist, directly beat and tortured hundreds, and left thousands more injured.

The corporate media subsumes, under the single category of 'violence', both the occasional erection of a barricade and its defence with a few bottles and sticks, and also the continuous assault on unarmed masses with teargas, flashballs and icy gushes of water laced with pepper spray. This is an insult to human intelligence, even if it's as low as that of corporate journalists, Leninists and cops.

All the actions that took place in Lausanne had the clear objective of obstructing the arrival of G8 delegates. The difference was only in tactics. A clear dimension they had in common was the reclamation of urban spaces. Whether done through a sit-in, a street party, or symbolic assaults on corporate property we have the common goal of cleansing our living space from its contamination by capitalism and the state. We want our streets back, but we're tired of asking politely.

Finally, we find it preposterous that the media is willing to play its divisive game after seeing the amazing levels of solidarity that were present during the police repression of activists in the Bourdonnette camp. For long hours in the blazing sun, surrounded by fully-armed police, protesters who earlier in the day had oriented themselves to differing levels of confrontation all maintained a non-violent, collective resistance to police attempts to intimidate. We were constantly making decisions by consensus, chanting slogans in each other's languages, freely sharing the food, water and cigarettes that we had and protecting people we'd never met before from arrest and brutalisation. We simply can't believe that journalists who saw this happen weren't blown away by our level of cohesiveness and strength.

To sum up. You can talk all you want, but for us the G8 blockades were a masterclass in revolutionary solidarity. They were the creation of a movement more united than we've ever seen. We discovered, together, that the colours of resistance can combine in a beautiful rainbow if we just try. Let the sounds of samba and breaking glass harmonise, because this movement has something stronger than guns. It has a memory.

A member of the black bloc explains why he was there.

I participated in the black blockade in Lausanne and in the non-violent resistance to the invasion of the Bourdonnette camp. I want to explain some of the reasons why. I have, in my lifetime, participated in many different kinds of action. My experience has shown that police repression and state violence isn't a response to violent demonstrations, but to effective ones. I took part in the largely peaceful demonstrations on 15th February 2003. I watched as they ignored us and went to war in the name of democracy. It showed that the biggest demonstrations won't change things if they just voice dissent. Direct action is the only way to make change.

All the blockades on 1st June took place in this spirit. They weren't about expressing an opinion. The people's 'opinion' has been voiced loud and clear, time and again. The blockades were about direct disruption of a high profile meeting of heads of state, to make the G8 face resistance.

I felt that, because our actions might be effective, we would certainly be attacked. I wanted to be able to defend myself and those around me. This was confirmed when the first police charges took place. They were against the pink and silver carnival, not the black bloc. The two blocs were clearly separate, acting in different areas. The police fired gas into the peaceful carnival because it got too close to the delegates' route. Because it was effective.

Many of the pink and silver bloc ran to the black bloc, who were more prepared to defend themselves. If it wasn't for their active resistance slowing the police advance, the space we held would have been cleared much more quickly. If it wasn't for the music and energy of the pink and silver bloc, it would have been a very dark place to be. When the two blocs merged under police attack it gave the space life.

Being attacked by heavily armed police is terrifying. I've come to feel more like fighting back and I've come to understand the value of the black bloc. This isn't the same as a riot. In the looting and street fighting, the people were mostly local kids. Some didn't even cover their faces. They broke windows for the rush of it and threw anything at the police in anger. This popular anger is the

result of alienation and the crushing of spirits by wage slavery, media propaganda and consumerism. It's beautiful in its way, but it isn't the same as a black bloc.

A well organised black bloc, as we were on 1st June, is made of autonomous groups of friends who are prepared to take to the streets with some common tactical understanding of what we are there for. To take space and defend it with barricades and projectiles, to use the fleeting moment in which we control the space to destroy the property and symbols of the disgusting system we are all forced to live under.

This property damage isn't 'random vandalism'. It's highly political and usually carefully targeted. I saw debates between groups about the politics of different targets, stones in hand. Some targets were attacked, others left intact as a result of these discussions.

The smashing and burning created by the black bloc is as important as the music and colour created by the carnival. If we just fight and destroy we'll create a very bleak world. Anti-capitalist movements are strong because they're imaginative and diverse, but some messages are crystal clear: capitalism kills, the way of life in the G8 countries is based on suffering and persecution.

If we really mean this then just partying on the streets is inadequate. It's right to respond to injustice with anger and to leave Lausanne and Geneva looking like a war zone. If these summits take place amid burning barricades and teargas it unmasks the real violence hidden by the slick corporate show. And it makes people sit up and take notice in a way that marching peacefully can't achieve. It gets noticed and opens political space for ideas to break through and grow. There's a scandal raised in the media about a few broken windows, yet our way of life is dependent on abuse, terror, poverty and exploitation. The hysterical condemnation of black bloc 'violence' is slightly insane.

I think this view was shared by the Lausanne residents who came out to wave at the masked-up black bloc and to accept the free food and cigarettes, liberated from looted shops, with a smile. Those people weren't threatened by the bloc's clearly targeted attacks. The parents and children who were caught in the indiscriminate police gas attacks in the park were terrified, but not of the masked up activists who helped them to safety.

Now WAR is over, activists ask what's next

For the last five years West London Anarchists & Radicals (WAR) has provided a focus for libertarian struggles in that part of the capital. Now its members explain why they've decided to wind the group up.

We formed WAR over five years ago as there was no revolutionary group existing in West London (in fact many revolutionaries who should have known better simply dismissed west London as 'posh'). As active individuals we also saw the potential benefits of working together collectively. In one of our first statements we said, 'do you live or work in west London? If you do, and your politics go something like this: class struggle; anti-hierarchical; anti-capitalist; libertarian; direct action (but open-minded about tactics), then we would like to hear from you' (first WAR leaflet, June 1998).

We hoped to make contact with other local revolutionaries and we also hoped that other local groups would spring up. We never viewed WAR as the sole font of knowledge and we never aspired to recruit anyone we worked with. We put together a mailing list based on people we knew and those who contacted us, and we sent out information bimonthly. We held regular discussion meetings that a number of different people attended at different times. WAR also had a fruitful relationship in 1999 with Citizen

Smith, a radical group who set up a squatted social centre in NW10. We got involved in some local campaigns and strikes. We produced numerous leaflets and handed out literally thousands of free newspapers, newsletters, and leaflets.

In November 2001 we began the publication of *WAR Cry*, which has come out almost monthly since. Although our newsletter is modest, due to a lack of resources, we agonised over which articles to include and submitted each other's contributions to vigorous criticism. We printed over 500 each month (photocopied for free at work places), handed them out in high streets and struggled to find outlets for distribution (in addition to posting out over fifty of each issue). We reported and commented on issues of local, national and international interest and concern, and publicised forthcoming events and actions. We could have used more graphics, cartoons, and humour but we always had too much to say and not enough room for it.

WAR was also involved in London-wide, national and international activities. We attended and helped put on conferences and anarchist bookfairs, we were instrumental in the first modern anti-capitalist Mayday, our members were involved in (amongst other things) prisoners' support, Critical Mass, asylum-seekers' campaigns, legal defence

and anti-war activity, as well as struggles in our daily lives. WAR members also wrote for and were involved in various anarchist and radical publications. We attended international anti-capitalist protests and numerous demonstrations and events.

Indeed WAR may have had a greater impact on the national anarchist and anti-capitalist movements than we had locally. We will never know who or how many have been inspired locally by our efforts, though we know that local groups elsewhere have been, so we live in hope! In part this was due to the fact that WAR was always more than the sum of its parts, so had lots of ideas, energy and commitment to contribute to activities beyond its locality. However, this also reflected the lack of local opportunities. Campaigns in west London remain thin on the ground, no other groups came into existence, and even finding places to leave *WAR Cry* or to hold meetings was a constant struggle. It is fair to say that, although people living locally have worked with us from time to time, few have actually taken the step of becoming actively involved in WAR.

Throughout our activities, which have been intense at times, we have remained on friendly terms, indeed we continue to work and play together. We're not disbanding due to any split, but simply because some of us are moving out of the area and others have

changes in their personal lives. No one group is indispensable, most groups have a limited period of effectiveness, the trick is to know when that time has come to an end and move on to different (and better) things. With the decline in numbers, WAR has reached that point and to continue now would be both difficult and negative.

We will continue to work together to produce a pamphlet summarising the activities of WAR and attempting to draw out some lessons for the future (it will be available at the Anarchist Bookfair). As individuals, we remain committed to revolutionary politics and we'll continue our activity wherever we find ourselves. Those of us remaining in west London would like to contribute to any local group of revolutionaries that arises in the future. To that end we'll maintain our postal and email addresses.

Finally we'd like to thank the readers of *WAR Cry* for their support, especially those we've had personal contact with. We remain convinced that the struggle for a world beyond capitalism – with its exploitation, wars and alienation – is more relevant than ever.

In solidarity
The WAR Collective

This is an excerpt from the last issue of *WAR Cry*. If you'd like to get a complete copy email war1921war@yahoo.co.uk with your address.

Forthcoming events

COULPORT

Saturday 2nd to Friday 15th August Trident Ploughshares disarmament camp at Coulpport, Scotland. See www.tridentploughshares.org or call 0845 4588 366.

DERBYSHIRE

Sunday 15th June Red Rambles meet at 11am outside Monsal Head Hotel, Monsal, Derbyshire, for five mile circular walk via Monsal trail and Little Longstone. Contact ain@ziplip.com or call 07775 977136 the day before.

DOVER

Saturday 21st June Dover live exports rally, meet 1pm at roundabout leading to Eastern Docks. See www.farmedanimalaction.co.uk or call 0845 456 0284.

DURHAM

Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd June North East Social Forum three-day event. For more details see front page advert.

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

Tuesday 17th June Trial at Hemel Hempstead Magistrates Court of 20+ people charged with

highway obstruction at the mass blockade of Northwood in January. Call 020 7937 0561.

LEICESTER

Tuesday 1st July Leicester Anarchist Federation meeting upstairs at Ale Wagon pub, Charles Street. See http://www.geocities.com/leicester_af/org.html

LONDON

Sunday 15th June Camden Green Fair and Bike Fest from 12 noon to 7pm at St James Gardens, Cardington Street, NW1.

Tuesday 17th June Say no to deportations of Iraqi asylum seekers. Picket and vigil outside the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 from 12 noon to 2pm. Call 07734 704742 or email d.jamal@ukonline.co.uk

Thursday 19th June International Refugee Day vigil for human rights from 4.30pm to 6pm at the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, SW1.

Friday 20th June Breaking the Silence: Somali Women Speak Out – theatre performance followed by discussion at Soho Theatre and Writers centre, 21 Deans Gate, W1 from 1pm to 2.30pm. **Saturday 21st June** at Hampstead Theatre, The Space, Eton Avenue, Swiss Cottage, NW3 from 7pm.

Saturday 21st June As part of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, Class War will be picketing the Wilkinson store at 78-102 The Broadway, Stratford, from 11am. See www.londonclasswar.org

Sunday 22nd June Jewish Socialist's Group public meeting at Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn at 7.30pm.

Tuesday 24th June Black Flag meeting at 7pm, 84b Whitechapel High Street, Whitechapel – get involved in planning the new issue.

Friday 27th June Benefit concert for peace in Kurdistan and Campaign Against Criminalising Communities at the Kufa Gallery, 26 Westbourne Grove, W2 from 8pm. See www.cacc.org.uk

MANCHESTER

Saturday 14th June Stop the war on asylum seekers, assemble at All Saints, Oxford Road (down past the BBC) and march to rally in the Peace Gardens (at the side of the Town Hall).

Tuesday 17th June Manchester Discussion Group

meet at the Hare and Hounds, Shude Hill, near the Arndale Centre at 8pm (future meeting dates on **15th July** and **19th August**)

Thursday 19th June Conscientious Objection in the 21st Century, conscience annual event at Manchester Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, from 10am to 4pm

Wednesday 2nd July Manchester SolFed meeting at the Hare and Hounds, Shude Hill, near the Arndale Centre, at 8.30pm. Topic will be Globalisation and the New World Order'. For more info see www.manchestersol.org.uk or call 07984 675281

MENWITH HILL

Friday 4th July Independence from America Day, annual demo at Menwith Hill spy base from 12 noon to 4pm. See www.caab.org.uk or call 01943 466405

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 14th June Stop the Occupation of Iraq stall at Grey's Monument from 12.30 to 1.30pm (and also on **28th June**). See <http://tyneside.sdf-cu.org/stopthewart/>

Tuesday 17th June Why Don't You is a new gathering of people who want to take direct action to stop injustice in creative, fun and effective ways. Each fortnight we will see video footage of recent direct action from around the world at the Side Cinema on Newcastle's Quayside at 7.30pm. For info see www.sidecinema.com/whydonyou.htm (future dates on **1st July** and **15th July**)

Wednesday 18th June Films of Roma struggles as part of the gypsy festival and in refugee week at 8pm, the Side Cinema on Newcastle's Quayside. See www.sidecinema.com

Wednesday 25th June Films about women and responding to violence, 8pm at the Side Cinema on Newcastle's Quayside.

OXFORD

Saturday 28th June Demonstration outside Campsfield Refugee Detention Centre, 12 noon at the main gates, Langford Lane, Kidlington, near Oxford (buses from Oxford city centre). This is a regular event on the last Saturday of every month. See www.closecampsfield.org.uk

PORTSMOUTH

Sunday 22nd June Protest against immigrant detention at Haslar Detention Centre, Clayhall Road, Gosport, at 4pm. For more info/directions contact 07801 290411 or see www.ncadc.org.uk

SOMERSET

30th July to 3rd August Big Green Gathering on a new site near Cheddar, Mendip Hills. For more info see www.big-green-gathering.com or call 01458 834629

STIRLING

Saturday 21st June Call Time on Convoys, a workshop on stopping nuclear weapons convoys, 1.30 to 4.30pm at the Cowane Centre, Cowane Street, Stirling. Hosted by Stirling CND (contact davidmc@enterprise.net or 01786 474450)

WORTHING

Monday 7th July Action is coming up on the Titnore Woods issue, with a call for protest outside pre-inquiry meeting at the Pavilion Theatre, Worthing, at 2pm. For more info see www.protectourwoodland.fsnet.co.uk or come to the next eco-action meeting at 7.45pm on **Tuesday 1st July** at The Downview, West Worthing

YORKSHIRE

13th to 17th August Earth First! Summer Gathering somewhere in Yorkshire. Contact summergathering@yahoo.co.uk

AUTONOMISTA TOUR

See www.autonomista.org for more on tour of this Argentinian show. For more venue details see www.londonlarc.org or call 020 7377 9088.

16th June Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton, 6pm;
18th June Guildford; **19th June** LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1, 7pm; **21st June** Durham University;
23rd June Manchester (thc); **25th June** The Trades Club, Hebden Bridge, 7.30pm; **1st July** Alexander Thompson Hotel, 320 Argyle Street, Glasgow, 7.30pm; **2nd July** Forest art space/cafe, Westport, Edinburgh; **3rd July** CWU, 15 Brunswick Street, Edinburgh, 7.30pm; **5th July** Lancaster Gregson Centre, Moor Lane, Lancaster, 8.30pm; **7th July** 1 in 12 Club, 21-23 Albion Street, Leeds; **8th July** Liverpool; **9th July** Cardiff; **11th July** Belfast and Dublin

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Iraq: American imperialism unleashed

Odessa Steps continues this three-part analysis of the factors which led to the invasion of Iraq.

Part two

THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

It's well-known that, before becoming Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney served as chairman and chief executive of Dallas-based petroleum corporation, Halliburton. During this time the firm did \$73 million worth of business with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In October 1995, the same month that Cheney was made CEO of Halliburton, the firm announced a deal that would put it first in line if war broke out with Iraq.

In case you think Cheney is just another businessman on the make, with good connections to the Pentagon, it should be remembered that when he was in the US Congress he voted against the Equal Rights Amendment, Nelson Mandela's release from prison, abortion rights and the use of bussing to desegregate schools.

Another corporation that stands to do well from the war is a subsidiary of Halliburton, Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR). It started out with a contract to extinguish oil well fires, but it's quickly moved into the oil production business with a contract worth \$600m. Ostensibly KBR is a construction firm, and on this basis won a share of the \$900 million contract to rebuild Iraqi bridges, roads and other basic infrastructure.

But more ominous is its stock in trade, the building of permanent American military bases. All twelve permanent US bases in Kosovo were built and maintained by KBR for a multi-billion dollar profit. KBR is in Iraq to build permanent bases there too, from which attacks on other Middle Eastern states can be staged.

Halliburton and KBR have worked closely with governments in Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Burma, Croatia, Haiti, Nigeria, Rwanda and Somalia during the worst chapters in those nations' histories, and many environmental and human rights groups have laid the blame for these tragedies at the companies' doors. Incidentally, KBR also built the cells for prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, \$300 million worth of them.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has many commercial connections, among them his seat on the board of Zurich-based engineering corporation ABB, which won a \$200m contract to supply nuclear reactors to North Korea in 2000. North Korea, part of the 'axis of evil' and next on the hit list proposed by neoconservative thinktank, The Project for a New American Century (PNAC), is a country in desperate need of aid and reconstruction – by US corporations no doubt.

Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld (and their stooge, Blair) have made a great deal of the 'threat' from North Korea's nuclear programme. So you have to wonder why, in January this year, the US administration helped ABB with \$3.5m to keep North Korea's reactor projects going, even as Korea expelled nuclear inspectors and withdrew from the non-proliferation treaty. Capitalism sees nothing wrong in profiting from illegal acts. Then it provides the international policemen to put things right, at a price. Finally it profits from 'rehabilitating' the offender.

Another company with a vested interest in the war on Iraq and in defence spending generally is the Carlyle Group. This is a private global investment firm managing capital worth \$12.5bn. Its interests are spread across 164 companies and include



There's profits to be made in the ruins of Baghdad

telecoms and defence. It's staffed at the highest levels by former members of the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations. Former President George Bush himself is employed as a senior advisor. So is long-time Bush family advisor and former Secretary of State James Baker.

One company acquired by Carlyle is United Defence, which supplies the US Army with a range of armaments including the Bradley fighting vehicle (used extensively in Iraq) and electric/pulse power weapons technology.

Ironically, one group that won't profit from Carlyle's involvement in America's military build-up is the family of Osama bin Laden, major investors in the Carlyle Group who profited greatly from the web of US-Saudi construction contracts and, until 2001, could access Republican politicians 'at the highest level'.

Soon after the fall of Umm Qasr, the British Army managed to get the port working under local management. Days later, the US administration handed Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) a £3m contract to run it. SSA is a ruthless global corporation notorious for its union-busting tactics, whose president is a major contributor to Republican candidates.

SSA played a leading part in the brutal struggle to suppress the American West Coast stevedores' strike in 2002, a struggle that involved mass arrests and violence by local police and which had begun to spread when George Bush (who else?) used legislation to end it and force the dockers back to work.

The SSA contract was quickly followed by similar ones to reopen and administer Iraq's airports, also won by an American firm. The US authorities then invited bids for a range of contracts, even down to printing and distributing school textbooks, all and only from American firms. Congress is considering a bill to prevent any cellphone system apart from CDMA being established in Iraq. European manufacturers use a different

system and Qualcomm, who gave money to the bill's sponsor, holds the patents for CDMA ... you get the picture.

The Iraqi exiles who advise the US government and military on privatising the country and support the rush by American corporations to gobble it up are the same ones, of course, who are being inserted into the Interim Iraqi Authority as 'people we can do business with'.

Another example is the priority given to the establishment and spread of US-controlled media to promote America's message to a traumatised people and demonstrate the global reach of American imperialism. The US moved first to take its rivals off the air, bombing both the al-Jazeera and Abu Dhabi television offices in Iraq. At the same time, it launched Towards Freedom Radio, and Towards Freedom TV under military control.

Towards Freedom TV, which Tony Blair recorded a speech for, was broadcasting even before the fall of Baghdad and long before power was restored to hospitals or the water ran clean in taps. Tragically for the US, most Iraqis have now switched to the Iranian state television service, al-Alam, and the Shi'ite clerics prosper.

The US moved quickly to privatise Iraq's oil industry under its military protectorate. Foreign companies have largely been excluded from Middle Eastern oil production since the 1970s, when Arab nationalism led to coups, nationalisation and home-grown industrial development.

But all this is going to change. A US-style corporation has been established with the former chief executive of Royal Dutch Shell US at its head and a board of fifteen international advisers – no Iraqis. 'Upstream', the oilfields and wells are being taken from the state-owned company and placed under military administration. 'Downstream', the petrol stations, derivatives industry (for generators and cooking) and distribution networks are being sold to US subsidiaries.

Who was Jay Garner, Iraq's short-lived US governor? A 'retired' general we were told. But until he was appointed, he was also heavily involved with L3 Communications, a company which has a \$1.3bn contract to supply logistical support to US special operations. He remains president of SY Technology, which makes guidance systems for the missiles that recently rained down on the country. He's also part of the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington and supporter of the current murderous regime in Tel Aviv. He proved out of his depth in Iraq, so Bush downgraded him and appointed instead Paul Bremer, a diplomat specialising in counter-terrorism – an act rather like making the Marquis de Sade head of Amnesty International.

What about Richard Perle? He was previously chair of the US Defence Policy Board but too many conflicts of interest caught up with him. One was his involvement in Triforce Partners, a firm that won a huge contract for 'homeland security', another his \$750,000 contract with the vast-but-bankrupt Global Crossing Corporation, which wanted to sell itself to China over Defence Department objections, a third his directorship of British-based Autonomy Corporation, recipient of a large contract for US Government security.

A coincidence? Before the war even began he was using information obtained from the Defence Policy Board to brief investors on how to profit from it – and from North Korea. These contracts were being awarded at the same time the US Congress was cutting \$20bn from the budget to help American war veterans and \$172m from educational programmes for the military. There's no fool like a does-as-they're-told soldier, and none so easy to kick.

The President, his father, the Vice-President, a whole host of powerful government officials, along with stockholders and executives from Halliburton and Carlyle, stand to make a mint from the invasion of Iraq. Long-time corporate sponsors from the defence, construction and petroleum industries will likewise profit enormously. Is the projected Pax Americana the totalitarian fascism of the future? Benito Mussolini said that fascism should more properly be called corporatism because it represented "the merger of state and corporate power." Draw your own conclusions.

Next issue: the great game of power

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Some activists who have been involved in London Mayday over the years analyse their successes and where to go next

Once again this year, direct action-orientated, largely anarchist Mayday protests, unsanctioned by the state, made headline news, especially in London. So routine has this become that it's difficult to remember that it was only in 1999 that the process of reclaiming Mayday in the capital began.

Mayday has become the one and only time in the year when anarchism or, more pointedly, anarchists, receive widespread coverage of their activities. Problematically, much of the attention is negative, portraying us as violent hooligans, not least in articles written by those employed to recuperate our ideas (liberals such as Vidal and Monbiot). Yet from 2000 to 2002, despite the negative coverage and the state's disinformation and over-reaction, our activities received a relatively large degree of support. This resulted in significant numbers turning out to clearly anti-capitalist and anti-state protests.

This year saw more of the same, but on a much smaller scale. This partly reflected the concerns of the state and ruling class in the face of the massive anti-war protests, and a slight increase in workers' struggles. Both of these led to the need to play down protests, as evidenced by the non-reporting of many anti-war direct actions and the offensive against the fire-fighters.

Bizarrely, and probably unconsciously, the media picked up on the fact that people opposed the war on Iraq precisely because they oppose senseless violence, suffering and destruction. In a twisted and hypocritical way they portrayed the Mayday protests as likely to result in exactly that. The demonisation of Mayday protests was much sharper and focused, potential participants were referred to from the outset as rioters and the events as riots, despite the fact that none of the previous Mayday protests resulted in a single prosecution for riot.

Meanwhile, the London Mayday Collective operated off a very short organisational run-in to the day. Given the intense level of anti-war and other activity this was unavoidable, although the failure to publicise the initial meetings properly wasn't. The Collective, correctly in our view, focused its activities on this capitalist war and on two of the engines of capitalism driving the pursuit of the war – the arms and oil industries. It gambled on the recent anti-war anger fuelling much greater dissent on Mayday. Sadly this was a miscalculation, so while the negative media coverage was less this year, so was the positive response to it and so was the turnout on the day.

After five years of anti-capitalist and largely anarchist attempts to reclaim Mayday, clearly we're at a point where we need to stop and think about both the validity of the protests and the way we organise them (or rather why so few do actually organise them).

As supporters of Mayday actions, we back the view that Mayday is both an important day to celebrate historical working class struggles and a focus for expressing our solidarity and desires in the here and now. But there does need to be a much wider debate on the politics we try to put forward, the strategic aims of our movement and how we combine these in action. In this sense, Mayday can't be seen in isolation, but rather as symptomatic of the problems facing the anti-capitalist movement as a whole.

Within the movement we can discern four main responses to Mayday. The first is localism. The argument here is that we should do something in 'our community' rather than in central London. Leaving aside whether there can be said to be any community under



Mayday reclaimed?

the rule of capital, we see no contradiction between ongoing local activity and participation in occasional mass actions. There are many who have had no difficulty combining the two.

The second objection is that the Mayday event isn't focused on class struggle. In this view class struggle is seen exclusively as strikes and workplace activity and, when you scratch the surface, all too often this reveals a belief that trade unions are the organisations of the working class. Logically therefore we should attend the trade union march. As revolutionaries, we reject the idea that the unions represent the class – what they actually represent is a layer of labour bureaucracy. The trade union march is as irrelevant as it was five years ago and – alongside the Countryside Alliance march – it remains the only demonstration promoted by the state.

A third strand is to view Mayday as a pointless (or at least ill-thought out) one-off confrontation with the state, on their territory playing and into their hands, which to a degree it was. The counterpoint to this is the need to 'do something now'. After all, London Mayday brought up to 4,000 protesters out, at numerous actions, taking our opposition to the front doors of the ruling capitalist class, saying fuck you despite the threats. It's this last point of view that held sway within the collective for the last two years, with the result that discussion of the political and even strategic aims of Mayday were pushed firmly into the background whilst consideration was given only to immediate tactical concerns.

As a result of these disagreements, and also because of the intense activity of many activists in anti-war and other work, the 2003 London Mayday Collective was not only smaller but represented a much narrower section of the movement. From the outset there was a lack of political discussion, with many activists seemingly content to accept that there was broad agreement, though this led to many disagreements being papered over.

While it was true that time was short, this was an excuse rather than the reason for this state of affairs. On the one hand, many seem to have only the vaguest critique of capitalist social relations and are consequently unwilling to subject this to further critique. Others, no doubt aware of the fragile unity that exists within the movement, don't press the issue. Again this is symptomatic of the wider problems we face.

A further problem stemmed from the lack

of structure. Whilst agreements appeared to have been reached and decisions taken at Collective meetings, many were overturned in subgroups or, worst of all, in informal groups outside the decision-making process. This led to the main debates, including the imagery and wording of the propaganda (see below), and indeed the actions themselves, being conducted by email, a useless medium for collective decision-making. Whilst there's no doubt that this was in part due to a lack of activists with time on their hands and the skills to do what was needed, resulting in a concentration of tasks and decisions on a very few people – 'leadership' by default – this isn't the whole story.

Another reason for the recent narrowing of the Collective could be a growing perception of Mayday (among other big 'days out') as failing to live up to its aspirations. Rather than acting as a hub to co-ordinate imaginative and inspirational alternatives to capitalism, using direct action, the actions chosen to embark upon have ended up being dictated by the cops. It's difficult to see what can be done here, other than not get into the situation in the first place, but this fails to answer our predicament. As we've seen over the last three years on Mayday, once we've been contained the primary focus has shifted, becoming instead a running battle to outwit the cops.

For some, a ruck with the cops ends up being a yardstick for success in itself. But it's an inadequate and unsustainable response, both tactically and in terms of our numerical strength. For others, Mayday is characterised by boredom, frustration and not being in control of events – feelings, ironically, that sum up and enforce much of our daily experience of life within capitalism. Not the kind of lasting memory of Mayday we set out months before to facilitate, surely?

This brings us to the propaganda, such as it was. We feel that little attempt was made to explain the politics of the event or to inject any revolutionary perspective by way of leaflet or paper. The imagery focused on the black bloc, never a significant part of the UK scene, with pictures of masked-up young men in macho poses. There was none of the ambiguity of previous years, no sense of fun and playfulness.

In the prop that was produced by the Collective on Mayday (a map with targets across central London), despite the dusting over of situationist-derived language, we were encouraged to reproduce the kind of alienated political practice that would have

Debord turning in his grave. Without a trace of irony the 'hardcore' radical staring out from the stickers and map served only to reinforce the separation of political action into something that should only be carried out by the specialists.

Some comrades independently produced a leaflet aimed at explaining the roots of the event and the ongoing tradition of class solidarity. This leaflet was well received by passersby on the day, many of whom were naturally curious. It's a shame that the Collective as a whole didn't consider such a leaflet a priority.

Yet despite all this we still believe the Mayday actions to have been worthwhile and a (relative) success, and despite our disagreements we acknowledge the commitment and courage of those involved. But where next?

We believe that Mayday isn't sustainable in its present form, although we remain committed to its original objectives just as we remain committed to the long-term revolutionary objective of smashing capitalism for a world of peace and freedom. If Mayday is to continue it needs to be more than an ad hoc collection of individuals, brought together through informal networks and occasional email invites to meetings (and we're guilty of this failing as much as anyone else). It will need to be adopted as an objective by the wider movement with a clearer political basis and tactical focus.

That means hard work – networking, discussion, honesty – and a breaking down of factional barriers to open up the process. We think it's possible to maintain a libertarian and revolutionary base while at the same time allowing for different perspectives. Difficult, granted, but possible we think and, moreover, absolutely necessary.

In looking forward it's essential that everyone concerned in the process next time doesn't ignore the need to clarify our objectives:

1. What we want to achieve?
2. How do we intend to achieve it?
3. How do these objectives get communicated? (Assuming we're looking for wider endorsement and attendance at a future mayday event).

Before winding itself up, the London Mayday Collective held a post-Mayday debrief that also looked forwards. There will be a Mayday meeting at the Anarchist Bookfair in October, followed by a mini-conference in November to discuss Mayday 2004. There now needs to be a wide debate on the content of Mayday, bearing in mind that it doesn't fall on a working day for the next three years. Perhaps the time to reclaim Mayday has come again?

Next issue

The next issue will be dated 28th June and the deadline for copy will be Thursday 19th June. You can mail contributions to FreedomCopy@aol.com

Donations: 1th May to 7th May 2003

AS, Isleworth, £6; DC, Manchester £3; GD, Ballymoney, £2; JC, Glasgow, £25; HS, Hebdon Bridge, £68; MG, Ulverston, £11; MH, Kings Winford, £22; NC, London SW6, £10; NF, Newport, £10; NT, Nelson, £6.

Anarchist press

Our comrades from *Black Flag* are holding an editorial meeting on 24th June. They positively encourage people to come and get involved. Join them in the *Autonomy Club* at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, 7pm.

There'll be a second meeting in the *Autonomy Club*, co-hosted by *Freedom* and *Black Flag*, on Tuesday 1st July at 7.30pm. This will continue the discussion which began on 15th April about the direction of the British anarchist press and other media. Members of all anarchist federations and none are warmly invited.

The Matrix Reloaded regurgitates pop culture, but it's still worth watching ... and the fight scenes are cool

A neat illustration of the way we live

"The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence."

— Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

Travelling at warp speed through the streets, he unmasks the nature of reality as he moves. A young man in sunglasses, tearing apart the computer-coded environment while simultaneously revealing the ungodly capacity of technology. Techno music blasting in the background, the audience is subjected to a feast of visual effects pumping our adrenaline, heightening our emotions to a state of awe. Enter *The Matrix*.

It was hard to distinguish where the commercial end and the film begins. This isn't to say the film is filled with product-placements, commercial endorsements and the like. It isn't — it's much more subtle than that. It isn't a question of content so much as of form.

In fact, the content could be better described as a series of stimuli, bright flashes of recognition throwing me into a state of passivity. I couldn't help but feel like one of the humans encased in an artificial womb, being harvested by something alien. And in this sense *The Matrix* is a perfect expression of contemporary capitalism, inadvertently enveloping all its paradoxes, contradictions, and false promises.

The story begins with Neo, the Christ-like superhero fighting his resurrected nemesis, Agent Smith, who has acquired the ability to clone himself. The stirring conformity of identical white men in suits arouses images of the one-dimensional man, a perfect manifestation of 1950s-style capitalism. In opposition to Agent Smith, Neo advances freedom as the power to choose, heroically fighting conformity with a diverse group of IT specialists, the new middle class.

This is the same class that's targeted by manufacturers of new cars, and the film provides exactly the same discourse — the freedom to choose, fighting conformity by driving your car really fast and listening to techno music really loud. So *The Matrix* is first and foremost a manifestation of 'artificial negativity', the system's attempt to channel dissent through its own ideas and institutions. This currently shows itself as the rebellion against conformity, the power to choose.

The refreshing reflexivity advanced in the film, showing that what seems to be reality is actually encoded and regulated by a diabolical system of control, draws on feelings of dissent while at the same time funneling these feelings towards the neoliberal hegemony of 'choice'. To this extent, *The Matrix* can be considered radical, even revolutionary (the final chapter of *The Matrix* trilogy is actually dubbed 'Revolutions'), while simultaneously pandering to the interests of capital.

Yet the apparent substance of the film is questionable. In one scene, Neo confronts a savvy bourgeois program as he tries to find the Keymaker. In the ensuing dialogue, the program describes the beauty and inevitability of causality, showing how the Keymaker created a program to provoke a woman's sexual arousal through the consumption of a piece of pie. So it's ironic that the film itself comes across as a reflex, a nervous tick, a stimulus letting our senses overwhelm us.



Most of the two and a half hours is made up of fight scenes (though I admit these are fucking cool).

The Matrix looks like Deleuze and Guattari's piece of glass, which beads of water slide across just like the beads of code we're initially confronted with, sliding down the film screen. There's no deeper logic. It brings in a hodgepodge of half-baked philosophical ideas, stolen from popular culture and distributed with copious amounts of visual stimulus. The film steals and co-opts elements of cyberpunk and animé, drawing on well-known stories that everyone recognizes; but it also self-satisfyingly pats itself on the back for understanding them.

Drawing on the myths and stories of Christ, Buddha and the world religions, drawing on the idea of Caesar undermined by his own arrogance, the ideas of *The Matrix* slide across the screen like water slides off glass, constituting their own logics, writing themselves.

Stimulus? Cause and Effect? While the film purports to advance voluntarism, it falls back on the logic of its own rhetoric. It can't be described as a conscious act of manipulation and it isn't a conspiracy. But it does show the cultural logic of the system, mechanically regurgitated in our direction.

Is *The Matrix* really bad? Actually it helped me understand the cryptic comments of the poststructuralists. For instance, Guy Debord's enormously inaccessible *Society of the Spectacle* has always been a struggle for me to get through. But after seeing the film, it all makes perfect sense:

"Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalisation of the social division of labour, the formation of classes, had given rise to a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order which every power shrouds itself with from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters; it has explained and embellished that which society could not do.

"Thus all separate power has become spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation of the poverty of real social activity, still

largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society can do, but in this expression the permitted is absolutely opposed to the possible.

"The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product and it's made its own rules. It's a pseudo-sacred entity. It shows what it is, a separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labour into a parcellisation of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever-expanding market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which forces that could grow by separating are not yet reunited" (*The Society of the Spectacle*).

In this sense, *The Matrix* is precisely what it advertises itself to be, a matrix. It's the product of a particular organisation of the relations of production pushing us into a state of passivity. It's founded on the separation of ourselves from our culture, regurgitated back at us at dizzying speed. Yet the film also provokes such critical thoughts as these. So I give it both a one and a ten out of ten.

Chris Hurl

This is a film all anarchists should go and see. This isn't because it's a great work of art, because it isn't (although it's entertaining enough). But it does deal with issues at the very core of anarchism — control, power, free will and choice. Okay, it has loads of car crashes, fights, explosions, stunts, cool clothes and special effects (2,500 of them, apparently). But it also has lines like this: "What's choice? It's an illusion created by the powerful to keep the powerless in their place." Or this: "What's the one thing someone with power wants? More power." Wasn't it an anarchist who said 'power is too important to give to the powerful'?

There are few blockbusters which make you think about issues like power while showing motorbikes crashing into buildings, bullets being dodged and fights taking place on top of moving trucks.

Both the *Matrix* films released so far (the concluding episode comes out in November) deal with the nature of reality, freedom and the part technology plays in our lives. The idea that machines have taken control is hardly new, but humans becoming plugged into a computer-generated reality is a neat twist on this old idea.

Technology is all around us, though we seldom truly notice it. *The Matrix* takes this idea to its conclusion: everything, including feelings, is created by a technology we don't even know we're part of. There's no free choice. Everything is predetermined. Effect follows cause. Free will is an illusion.

What little freedom there is in *The Matrix* exists on the margins. A small band of humans who have freed themselves from the machines and struggle at the edge of existence in Zion. Rogue computer programs live furtive lives, inside the system but free of the mainframe and its architect. These are the only beings who seem free to determine their destiny, though the film reveals that even their freedom can be illusory. Choices have been made before they know it. The best that can be hoped for, as the Oracle tells Keanu Reeves's character, Neo, is to try to understand what the purpose of the choice is.

This is the stuff of genetic determinism, the idea that our genes determine what we do. *The Matrix*, of course, swaps a computer for genes but it amounts to the same thing — some scientists use the analogy of a computer to describe behaviour. Actions (like moving your hand or picking your nose) occur a nanosecond before our brains register the fact. We don't consciously decide what to do. I could rewind my life and start again but I'd turn out exactly the same as I am now. We react like programmed machines and make sense of the actions later, just as Neo is told.

The week before I saw *The Matrix Reloaded* I read philosopher Daniel Dennett's *Freedom Evolves*, which covers the same territory (luckily for anarchists Dennett concludes that humans do have free will and that pure genetic determinism is bunk). Little did I expect the ideas in his book about human nature to pop up in a film like *The Matrix Reloaded*, but they do.

Throughout the film character after character muses about freedom and control and power, and the message is clear: we need to dismantle power to be free. Can't everyone in the multiplex see that this applies to capitalism? And just to reinforce this message, the song over the credits is *Calm Like a Bomb* by America's top Marxist musicians, Rage Against The Machine. This is revolutionary stuff.

Richard Griffin

Answers to Anarcho-quiz (back page)

1. Subcommandante Marcos added this jolly postscript in a reply he wrote to the armed Basque group ETA.
2. Stereotypically, it's Bakunin. He plays an IRA man in Mexico, who says, "When I started using dynamite, I used to believe in a lot of things. All of it! Now I believe only in dynamite."
3. Pablo Picasso. When he visited Paris in May 1901, he stayed with Pere Manach, a Spanish art dealer and anarchist. While noting he did not attend anarchist meetings, the police report concluded: "It is apparent that Picasso shares the ideas of his compatriot Manach."
4. Since she began making music again, Moe has joined several bands, among them the experimental blues outfit the Kropotkins. One can only guess where they got the name.

A sideways look

When New Labour came to power, one of the things they promised was more 'joined-up' government. They probably weren't thinking of the case of Iranian Kurdish poet Abas Amini, who sewed his eyes and mouth up in protest against British asylum policy. Iran may be the next target in the 'Axis of Evil', a notion this government has bought into wholesale, but that doesn't mean it's so bad anyone might need to flee from it. And especially someone who is a Kurd and a communist, and clearly a very brave man with the courage to stand up to the right-wing press and its lackeys in the British government.

Abas escaped jail in Iran and made it to Britain, where he claimed asylum two years ago. He was backed up by a medical report which supported his claim that he'd been tortured. His case was adjourned five times, sometimes because the wrong interpreter was sent. The government didn't even turn up to the final hearing.

When his claim was finally granted two months ago, the callous weasels at the Home Office felt it necessary to appeal. His response was extreme, but born of desperation. Abas was convinced that Iran would execute him if he returned there. The attention he got meant the British state backed down. At first he vowed to continue until all refugees were treated better, but has now listened to friends and come off his hunger strike.

Labour want to be seen to be tough on people like Abas, escaping from torture, because a significant chunk of this country believes they're scroungers and come here for the oh-so-generous benefits. This is the party line of the right wing press, owned by very rich men with very hard hearts. New Labour are grateful to these scumbags for not urging people to vote for the Tories. Like anyone was going to.

However, in the last few weeks a new issue has enthralled the right wing press – the European constitution. And chief among the arguments is that it will make Britain like Europe. They talk of sovereignty being damaged by a few bureaucrats in Brussels, while ignoring bigger threats like the ones from multinational corporations or American imperial ambitions. I'm no big fan of government from Brussels, but then I'm no big fan of government from Westminster either.

And Europe means higher taxes. That's why the *Sun* regularly promotes booze cruises to France, because their taxes are lower on wine but higher on rich people. Their benefits are higher too, which in the world of very rich men is a *bad thing*, as it stops the French working very cheaply for them. But, hang on, if we listen to these same papers, our high benefits make all these asylum-seekers want to come here. So why don't they go to other countries with better benefits? Must be our famed 'culture of tolerance'.

It can't be argued both ways. Either our benefits are great and a magnet to the world's poor, or they're not and our economy would



be irreparably harmed by joining up to the Common Market (is this 1973?). I'll leave the last word to Abas, saying that asylum seekers didn't come to Britain for economic reasons. "They wouldn't have made the hazardous journey to Britain if conditions in their own countries were better."

Svartfrost

Readers' digress

DOROTHY BREAKS FREE

Dorothy was a timid 50 year old. She had worked as an administrative assistant in the same company for the past thirty years. However, the last few months had become unbearable. In its ongoing quest for greater and greater monetary reward, the company had burdened her with more and more work. To make things worse, they had appointed a new area manager, David Shearsmith. This man was lewd, rude and downright tyrannical. He had reduced poor Dorothy to tears on several occasions. He had even sacked the cleaning staff, leaving her the odious task of cleaning out his private toilet.

On the day that the bigwigs from Head Office were due to examine the branch's staff morale, Dorothy had decided that enough was enough. She had complained to her trade union on several occasions but had found herself bogged down in bureaucracy. After all, hadn't she read some graffiti somewhere which astutely claimed that 'the unions are brothels'? It was time to act for herself. With this in mind, she left the office under the pretence of giving Shearsmith's

private lavatory its daily clean. She knew that the man always sat down to expel the contents of his bowels at 10.45am. That was exactly fifteen minutes before the bosses were due. It was now 10.30am, so she had to act fast. She had brought a tube of superglue with her today with the express purpose of applying it to the lavatory seat. She did this with relish and left the toilet just as Shearsmith was entering. "Fancy coming in to watch?", the pockmarked, balding man chided her as he closed the door behind him. Dorothy shyly shook her head and pretended to make her way back to the office.

However, she did not return to the office. Instead, she rushed out of the building to collect two buckets of stinking, effluent slop. With just five minutes to go until the bigwigs were due to arrive, Dorothy darted back to the toilet. She listened at the door and, as expected, heard the grunts of an overweight man trying to lift his weighty frame from the seat. "Ah, success," she thought to herself as she opened the lavatory door. "Is that you, Dorothy?" asked the quaking voice from inside the cubicle. "Yes it is" replied the defiant woman as she proceeded to empty the buckets over her now-timorous tormenter. She then picked the lock on the cubicle door and left it ajar so that the gathering throng of fellow workers could enjoy this wonderful spectacle. The sound of laughter spread throughout the building as the vile potestate was reduced to tears. There he sat, glued to a toilet seat and covered in stinking waste, as the bosses arrived on the scene. Obviously they didn't share the workers' sense of humour and demanded to

know who was responsible for this floor show. "I am," replied a confident Dorothy. "Bureaucrats have at their disposal little more than prestige, respect and all the trappings of their position. They take themselves and their positions utterly seriously, and because of this it is possible to utterly demolish both them, personally, and the sacristy of their office. Humour is the arch-enemy of prestige." After finishing these words, she clicked her heels together and left the building to rapturous applause.

IRONY MONGER

Now I'm not one to place limits on anybody's comic creativity. As all good libertarians know, freedom is freedom is freedom. However, a friend of mine recently told me about the time he encountered Jim Davidson at a party for recovering alcoholics. "Excuse me, sir," he said. "Do you think that your 'Chalky White' impression could be construed as offensive to people of colour?" Mr Davidson told him not to worry. He wasn't being racist. He was merely using irony as a vehicle to mock existing racial stereotypes. "In that case", my friend retorted, "could you please tell me if those gentlemen over there are burning down that mosque ironically." Everybody's favourite cheeky cockney had no answer for this smartarse remark. In fact he had totally lost interest in the conversation. He was too busy hitting his mother-in-law over the head with a frying pan.

Shamelessly lifted from *Readers Digress!*, an "irregular freesheet for the irregular mind". For copies send SAE to Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. When she talks about bureaucracy and humour, Dorothy is quoting Penelope Rosemount, 'Humour or Not or Less or Else' in *King Mob Echo: English Section of the Situationist International*, published by Dark Star.

Anarcho-quiz

1. Who said "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"?
2. What is James Coburn reading at the beginning of the Sergio Leone film *A Fistful of Dynamite*?
3. Who was turned down when he requested French nationality in 1940, despite being posthumously honoured?
4. What connects Velvet Underground drummer Moe Tucker and anarchism?

For answers see page 7

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